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ABSTRACT

Attitudes and decisions regarding older workers should become an increasingly important issue for industrial/organizational psychologists in the 1980's. A variety of problems encountered by older workers has prompted concern about age discrimination in industry. Situational factors also affect the extent to which stereotypes about groups influence decisions about individuals. This study attempts to provide empirical information on the age perceptions of 40 managerial jobs. Managers (N=120) were asked to complete either a frequency grid questionnaire or a numerically anchored rating scale describing their perceptions of the age distribution in each job. Jobs were classified as older, younger, or age neutral only if results obtained using the two questionnaires provided converging classifications. Sixty-two percent of the jobs were classified as older, younger, or age neutral jobs using the convergence criteria, indicating that these jobs could be reliably classified by managers according to their age characteristics. This research suggests that future studies should take a more interactionist approach to unfair decision-making by examining personal and contextual factors. Data tables and the two questionnaires are provided. (ABL)

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Age Perceptions of Jobs: Convergence of Two Questionnaires

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Running head: JOB PERCEPTIONS

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to provide empirical information on the age perceptions of 40 managerial jobs. One hundred twenty managers were asked to complete either a frequency grid questionnaire or a numerically anchored rating scale describing their perceptions of the age distribution in each job. Jobs were classified as older, younger, or age neutral only if results obtained using the two questionnaires provided converging classifications. Sixty-two percent of the jobs were classified as older, younger, or age neutral jobs using the convergence criteria. The consideration of contextual variables such as job characteristics is discussed in relation to decision outcomes.

Age Perceptions of 40 Jobs:
Convergence of Two Questionnaires

Attitudes and decisions regarding older workers should become an increasingly important issue for industrial/organizational psychologists in the 1980's. The average age of the workforce is increasing (Glickman, 1982). In addition, there is concern about the possibility of unfair age discrimination in industry, prompted by the variety of problems that older workers encounter in the workplace (Sheppard, 1970; Shaw, 1972; Arvey & Mussio, 1973; Stagner, 1974; Rosen & Jerdee, 1976a & b; Cohen & Bunker, 1977). One reason for unfair discrimination might be the widely shared belief and attitudes that we hold about older workers (Rosen & Jerdee, 1976a). These views appear to negatively affect decisions and behavior regarding older individuals (Sherif & Sherif, 1969; Rosen & Jerdee, 1976b).

However, group membership is only one type of information which could potentially affect decisions. Situational factors may play a role in determining the extent to which stereotypes about groups of individuals influence decisions (Heilman, 1980; 1983; Cleveland & Landy, 1983; Cleveland, Festa, & Montgomery, 1984). For example, it appears that the characteristics of jobs interact with stereotypes of individuals to influence promotion, awards and performance decisions. In a job typically held by or perceived to be held by a younger person, an older worker may be rated more negatively than a younger person. Conversely, in a job typically held by an older person, a young individual may receive less favorable decisions than an older person. In the present study, descriptive information on the perceived age characteristics of 40

managerial positions is presented. The research represents a preliminary investigation into the situational or contextual variables that may inhibit or enhance the possibility of unfair discrimination in industry.

Job Stereotypes and Occupational Bias

The existence of job stereotypes has been documented in research on gender discrimination (Cohen & Bunker, 1977; Deaux & Emswiller, 1974; Heilman, 1980; 1983). A job is perceived to have a sex-related "stereotype" when the traditional and/or predominant incumbent is perceived to be either male or female. The findings of these studies suggest that discrimination is most likely to occur when an individual applies for or occupies a position for which the traditional incumbent gender is incongruent with his/her gender. Heilman (1983) posits that the greater the perceived incongruity between person-situation characteristics, the worse the presumed lack of fit and thus, "the greater the likelihood and/or magnitude of the biased judgment or behaviors" (p. 11).

In similar research on age bias, Cleveland and Landy (1983) found an interaction between the age characteristics of the job and the age characteristics of the individual. In a job age-typed as younger, "older" individuals received less award money and were promoted less rapidly than "younger" individuals. Subjects gave lower performance ratings to individuals whose age characteristics did not match the age characteristics of the job. These significant job-person characteristic interactions are similar to the interactions found in the literature on occupational gender bias.

The term job "stereotype" in research on sex bias refers to the widely held perceptions of the characteristics of incumbents in those jobs.

Whether these job perceptions are accurate or inaccurate, it appears that the decision outcome is the same. Workers receive less favorable decisions when applying for or occupying a position where their personal characteristics are incongruent with the characteristics of the traditional incumbent.

Present Study

Although sex stereotypes of jobs are reasonably well-documented, there has been little research which documents the age-related characteristics of job titles or tasks. The present research provides descriptive data on the perceived age distribution in 40 managerial positions. Previous research has shown that unfair discrimination is likely to occur when person-job characteristics do not "fit." Therefore, we may be able to predict in what jobs unfair discrimination is most likely to occur by documenting the age-related characteristics of occupations.

Method

Subjects

Participants were 120 middle-level exempt employees of a large manufacturing organization. Their age ranged from 23 to 65 years.

Instruments

Two questionnaires were used to measure the perceived age characteristics of 40 jobs. The jobs were selected from personnel files and represented lower- to upper-level management positions.

Frequency Grid. Sixty-one subjects distributed 100 points among 7 age categories in a way which reflected their perceptions of the age distributions of incumbents in each of the 40 jobs. The format and instructions for the Frequency Grid appear in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Graphic Rating Scale. Fifty-nine subjects rated each of the 40 jobs on a 7-point scale indicating the degree to which it was a younger person's job (rating of "1") or an older person's job (rating of "7"). The format and instructions for the Graphic Rating Scale appears in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Criteria for Classifying Jobs

For both questionnaires, the frequency of responses for each age category were computed for each of the 40 jobs. The primary criterion for classifying each job as younger, older, or age-neutral was the distribution of responses among the 7 age categories. A job was defined as a younger person's position when 60% of the responses from the Frequency Grid questionnaire fell in the first three categories (under 20 to 39 years) and when 60% of the ratings on the Graphic Rating Scale also fell in the first 3 rating categories.

A job was classified as an older person job when 60% of the responses to the Grid Format questionnaire fell in the last 4 categories (40 to over 70 years) and when 60% of the ratings on the graphic Rating Scale fell into the last four rating categories (anchors 4 to 7).

For several jobs, responses on both the Grid Format questionnaire and the Graphic Rating Scale were evenly distributed over all 7 response

categories. A job was classified as age-neutral if fewer than 60% of the responses on both the Grid Format and the Graphic Rating Scale were concentrated in either the first 3 or the last 4 response categories. Because a job could be classified as either an older job, a younger job, or an age-neutral job only when convergence was achieved across independent samples and using different questionnaires, the unambiguous classification of all 40 jobs was not expected.

Procedure

One hundred and fifty copies of each questionnaire were distrubuted to employees by the Corporate Personnel Director. Each subject received only one of the two questionnaires. Sixty-one subjects returned the Frequency Grid questionnaire (41% return rate). Fifty-nine subjects returned the Graphic Rating Scale (39% return rate).

Results

Table 1 lists the 25 jobs which met the convergence criteria and could be classified into younger, older or age-neutral positions. Table 1 also presents the percentage of responses which fell into the first three categories and the last four age categories on both questionnaires.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 2 lists the occupations that did not meet the convergence criteria and presents the percentage of responses on both of the questionnaires.

Insert Table 2 about here

The percentage of jobs which can be classified provides one measure of the convergence of the results obtained using two questionnaire measures. A more sensitive measure of agreement is obtained by computing the correlation between the proportions of responses allocated to each of the seven response categories using the two different questionnaires. Because of violations of independence assumptions, the usual significance test for r does not provide an adequate test of the hypothesis as an inferential statistic. However, the correlations reported in Tables 1 and 2 are useful as discriptive statistics. There was substantial agreement between the two questionnaire formats on the distribution of ages for each of the 40 jobs. The correlations ranged from .63 to .99.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that some positions can be reliably classified by managers according to their age characteristics. Sixty-two percent of the jobs met the convergence criteria and could be classified into younger, older or age-neutral positions.

In the present study, we have called the perceived age distributions of jobs, the age-type of the job. These perceptions may reflect actual age distributions or may reflect inaccurate perceptions. Regardless, whether these perceptions are accurate or inaccurate, they appear to play a role in determining the extent of bias in a given situation (Cleveland & Landy, 1983; Heilman, 1980). Older workers appear to receive more negative

decisions regardless of whether the job is perceived to be a younger job or is actually a younger person position.

It is possible that the age characteristics of the job may be confounded with organizational level of the position. This is a natural phenomenon in organizations. However, there is good reason to believe that although related, the organizational level of a position is not identical to the age type of that job. When asked to judge the organizational level of these 40 position, an independent sample of subjects did not rate "older" typed jobs as consistently reflecting upper-level organizational positions. For example, the job titles, Market Manager, District Sales Manager, Manager-Financial Analyst/Planner, and Group Systems Manager, were classified in the present study as "older" person job titles. However, all of these titles were judged as middle-level organizational positions (over 63% of the subjects rated them as middle-level positions).

The organizational level of a job is not an issue unique to research on age bias. For example, jobs traditionally perceived as feminine are usually lower level/power positions (secretary, nurse) than jobs perceived as masculine (manager, physician). Certainly additional descriptive research is needed to identify those positions, similar in organizational level and similar in duties/skills where age and gender characteristics differ.

These descriptive data provided in this study are useful for at least two purposes. First, they provide necessary preliminary information for future research on age bias. Research should take a more interactionist approach to unfair decision-making. That is, both the personal factors and

contextual factors that may influence decisions should be jointly considered. The data presented here represent one step in the direction of providing a taxonomy of situational characteristics which are likely to inhibit or enhance bias due to age, sex, race, etc.

The data also provide useful information for industry, including such decision-makers as managers and vocational counselors. The findings provide managers with preliminary information to use as a basis for trouble-shooting specific areas in the organization where biased decisions are most likely to occur. Rather than merely being concerned about the relative presence or absence of discrimination in their organizations, managers will be equipped with job title information which could pinpoint specific potential problem areas.

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Table 1

Jobs Classified by Age Using the Frequency Grid and the Graphic Rating Scale

Younger Jobs	Frequency Grid		Graphic Rating Scale		Correlation Between the two Scales
	% in first 3 categories	% in last 4 categories	% in first 3 categories	% in last 4 categories	
Intermediate Programmer	71	29	83	17	.81
Junior Accountant	79	21	93	7	.63
Junior Project Engineer	69	31	92	8	.81
Neutral Jobs					
Buyer	49	51	49	51	.97
Production Planner	53	47	51	49	.97
Print Shop Manager	45	55	53	47	.94
Supervisor of Customer Service	47	53	55	45	.96
Assist. Regional Sales Mgr.	47	53	58	42	.95
Sales Enginner	49	51	53	47	.98
Senior Programmer	46	54	55	45	.95

Table 1 (con't)

Older Jobs	Frequency Grid		Graphic RatingScale		Correlation between the two scales
	%in first 3 categories	%in last 4 categories	% in first 3 categories	% in last 4 categories	
Regional Credit Manager	37	63	27	73	.70
Director of Accounting	31	69	12	88	.85
Vice-President and Controller	17	83	2	98	.74
Senior Project Enginaer	35	65	27	73	.95
Senior Process Engineer	36	64	25	75	.89
Plant Superintendent	28	72	32	68	.99
Regional Sales Manager	35	65	21	79	.94
Vice-President of Sales	25	75	5	95	.73
District Sales Manager	35	65	35	65	.97
Marketing Manager	36	64	37	63	.94
Director of Research and Development	22	78	14	86	.96
Plant Manager	20	80	7	93	.92
Mgr, Financial Analyst/Planing	31	69	28	72	.94
Group Systems Manager	33	67	30	70	.94
Principal Project Engineer	39	61	36	64	.97

Table 2

Jobs That Did Not Meet the Convergence Criteria

Job Title	Frequency Grid		Graphic Scale		Correlation between the two scales two
	Z.in the first 3 first 3 categories	Zin the last 4 categories	Zin the first 3 categories	Z in the last 4 categories	
Traffic Analyst	50	50	67	33	.87
Cost Accountant	54	46	68	32	.93
Director of Safety	43	57	22	78	.69
Office Manager	46	54	38	62	.97
Personnel Manager	39	61	42	58	.91
General Accountant	52	48	65	35	.94
Asst. Regional Credit Manager	51	49	70	30	.87
Territory Manager	39	61	45	55	.97
Sr. Warehouse Super.	41	59	30	70	.91
Plant Engineer	41	59	39	61	.91
Sales Representative	57	43	72	28	.74
Quality Control Engineer	49	51	66	34	.91
Chemist	48	52	75	25	.79
Superv., Plant Cost/Budget	41	59	60	40	.85
Financial Analyst	48	52	65	35	.88

Instructions: You are asked to complete the following questionnaire. On the line next to each job title, please use a total of 100 "people" and divide the "people" in such a way that reflects your feelings about the distribution of age in each job.

The age category that you think is most typical for the job should have the largest number of "people" in it. The category that you feel is not typical of the job may have few or no "people" in it.

Example:	Below 20 Years	20-29 Years	30-39 Years	40-49 Years	50-59 Years	60-69 Years	over 70 Years
Export Sales Manager							

Figure 1. Instructions and Format for the Frequency Grid Questionnaire

Instructions: You are asked to complete the following questionnaire. Please indicate the degree to which you view each of the jobs as being typically a younger person's job or an older person's job. Use the 7-point scale presented to the right of the job title.

Example:

Export Sales Manager	1	2	3	4	5	(6)	7
	Young			Middle-Age			Old

In the above example, the age rating of"6" indicates that you view the job as predominantly an older person's position.

Figure 2. Instructions and Format for the Graphic Rating Scale.